{See Note at end.}

UNITY

CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT,

FOR

FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

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TRUE WEALTH.

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II Corinthians, vi, 10: "As having nothing, yet possessing all things."

Though Paul wrote in Greek, I think that he had here in mind a distinction familiar to all readers of Roman history in the Latin tongue. The distinction between ownership and possession gave rise to conflicts that repeatedly threatened destruction to the Roman commonwealth, and finally issued in revolution. Large numbers of people possessed land which they did not own; for possession denotes not ownership, but occupancy. I may own what I do not possess; I may possess what I do not own. And possession is of far more importance to me than ownership; for ownership may not be within my power, and if it be, I probably shall covet more, and shall never think that I have enough; while I can possess all that I want to possess, and the more I possess, the more easily and rapidly I can extend and multiply my possessions.

Let me develop these thoughts; not because they are new, but because they are true, and it is often very wholesome for us to give our hearing to truths which, in consequence of their familiarity, have fallen into neglect.

As regards having, there recur frequently of late in the civilized world crises and periods of depression in which having nothing is the dread of almost all property-holders and men of business. It is at this moment the condition of many whose wealth three years ago seemed above contingencies. In view of what we have witnessed, who can say that his own investments are so secure that he may not wake any morning to bankruptcy and penury? This state of things has a lesson, trite like almost all those I am now going to say, but so trite that it is seldom dwelt upon as it deserves to be, namely, that our havings are not to be depended upon for our happiness. Still it is the misfortune of most of us that even if we think that our happiness is not contingent on outward things, we yet have formed tastes and habits which we cannot sacrifice without conscious hardship. Indeed, modes of living all through the country were made extravagant within the memory of those still in middle life, in consequence of the fictitious and baseless prosperity created by an inflated currency and by public debts handled as if they were private wealth. Before this period, when wants were fewer and habits were more simple, having nothing would have been to almost all then living a much less arduous trial, a much less painful ex-

perience, than it is now to the many who are passing through it. But even if we feel the need of much outward good, we cannot depend upon it for happiness and place it in the rank of supreme good, without being dissatisfied with what we have, though it far exceed what we can use. Indeed, I have never known any persons so wretchedly and pitiably poor as the rich poor. No conceivable inducement could make me willingly to enter into some great estates that I have known, if I had to assume toward them the attitude of their owners,—men who, having what ought to satisfy a score of owners, really possessed nothing.

In fact, every one needs great possessions in order to be, I will not say happy, but even contented; but we may have great possessions, yet have nothing. I read not long ago the memoir of a man who was for more than twenty years the bishop of Newfoundland, Labrador and the Bermudas. He had been in earlier life a Fellow of one of the Colleges at Oxford, and had led in England a life of affluence, comfort and privilege, though of hard work. In his dreary and storm-swept diocese, he seems, in the sense of enjoyment, to have had nothing. A large part of every year was spent in toilsome and perilous navigation from port to port, and in sojourns where money could not buy the comforts of civilized life; and during the intervals, when he might have given himself some indulgence, he practised extreme self-denial, that the Church might have the funds which he would not use in his own behalf. The picture presented in the memoir is that of a marvellously happy man,—happy because he possessed every thing, and every human being too, within his range. There seemed to be no object, occasion, experience, interview, which did not yield him a revenue, or I should rather say, from which he did not force a revenue, saying as Jacob to his mysterious antagonist, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." I quote this instance, not as in itself remarkable, except because such a man has the means of judging by comparison (and there is no judgment that is not a comparison) between the happiness of having and that of possessing without having. There are many of the havers who have never been possessors; there are many of the possessors who have never been havers; there are many, again, who have first attempted to possess when they were inevitably deprived of what they had. None of these are competent witnesses. But every instance in which one who has known the enjoyment of having, and voluntarily, in the unimpaired prime of his power of enjoyment, has exchanged it for a life of possessing without having, and has pronounced this the better, bears a testimony that is worthy of our diligent heed.

But let us look at some of the items of the wealth which we may possess without having,—at some, I say; for the full catalogue it would take a lifetime to rehearse, inasmuch as to him to whom Paul's words, "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," are applicable, it is said with truth, "All things are yours."

In the first place, all nature may be our possession, and is so when we are in communion with the incorruptible spirit that is in all things,—when the smile of God beams upon us from the heavens, his voice comes to us on the waters, his breath is wafted to us in the fragrance of spring and summer, his bounty makes our souls rich and glad in the mellow beauty and harvest-wealth of autumn, his might and majesty awaken high thoughts in the awful grandeur of winter,—when every phase of creation reveals to us his joy-giving goodness, his kindly providence, the vastness of his omnipotence, the mysteries of his wisdom, the immeasurable height and depth and fulness of his love. So far as I can take in all this or any part of it with adoring reverence and with the fervor of a child's heart, it is all mine. Whoever else calls it his, its usufruct, its revenue is mine.

Equally is ours the divine inspiration that there is in art. The great works that make this world so much the fitter home for man are none of them private or corporate property. They belong not to this gallery or to that church, but to every soul that can take them in, can feel in them their more than human grandeur or loveliness of conception, and can trace in them the divine archetypes of which they are copies.

How can we adequately prize this capacity of the permanent possession, with perpetual revenue, of what in nature or in art we have seen but once,—the photographic and presentific power of memory, which makes a mountain, a cataract, a picture, a statue, a cathedral, our life-long property, renewing for years and years the freshness of admiring, adoring thought with which we first beheld it! How rich we grow with these treasured experiences,—with the numberless slides of the magic lantern, some lingering for hours in the field of sight, others gliding rapidly over the retina of the mind's eye, yet always with clear and beatific vision!

Then, too, in humanity are not all the great and good of our race ours? Ours they are when they feed our thought, when they enrich our imagination, when they stir us to noble purpose and endeavor, when they cherish our love, enlarge our charity, lift our souls on the wings of their devotion, breathe into us their gentleness and sweetness, awake in us a generous emulation, present to us patterns of excellence by which we may train our spirits, and make our lives true and beautiful, meek and kind, beneficent and philanthropic. They are ours all the more because death has made them immortal,—because from shining lights on earth they have become stars in the upper firmament, where they can be seen by every eye, and may be guiding luminaries on the way that all may tread. What an unspeakable blessing is it, too, that there are not a few such men and women whom we have known and still know, who have seemed to us hardly to need the consecration of death to make them fixed stars in the heaven of our reverence and love! How truly have all these, the living and the dead, been ours because they were Christ's and God's! Our revenue from them we should term precious beyond all else that could be ours, did they not point and lead us to the all-perfect Savior, who made them what they are, and whom it is ours to possess in ever-growing fullness, if we will mark the steps by which he passed on to heaven, and follow him whithersoever he goeth.

Ours in possession also is, or ought to be, the vast sum of human happiness; for this is a happy world,—immeasurably happy, with all the exceptions and abatements that we can number up. Even under what seems to us perpetual cloud and shadow there is in man a power of adaptation, an elasticity of spirit, which probably gives a preponderance of pleasurable sensation to almost every human life; while on how many lives, in every condition, the shadows, however deep, are transient, and the clouds have golden rifts! How many, within our familiar knowledge, are the happy homes, the successful and honorable lives, the youth of glad promise, the men and women in their genial and glorious prime, those serenely happy in old age, those for whom the sunset of the earthly life is consciously the dawn of heaven! All this happiness is ours. Imagine, if you can, your own life painless, prosperous, affluent, yet with different surroundings,—yourself alone in the sunshine, all but yourself, or your own household, in rayless gloom,—could the sunbeams that shone for you alone cheer or warm you? Would not the misery around you make you wretched? There is not a glimpse of joy in another's countenance that kindles not in you an answering joy. There is not in your circle a happy home that does not make your own home the happier. Even in your disappointments and sorrows, you have comfort in living in a happy world. In your bereavements it is your consolation that there are unstricken households around you,—that there are voices of health and gladness that can break in upon your grief. Happy, thrice happy is it for us that we are members of one body,—that we do sincerely sorrow and rejoice with one another; for the balance is immensely on the side of joy. We indeed note and remember the moments of painful sympathy, and this is because they are the exceptions, not the rule. And even they are not without their revenue of satisfaction, if not of gladness. Our very fellow-feeling, with the comfort it has given, with the kinship of spirit which it has created, with the closer friendship and the dearer love to which it has given birth, is among the last experiences which we would part with,—among the memories which we would gladly treasure for the blessedness

to come, when we may look back together on all earthly sorrows as we do on troubled dreams when we wake in health and happiness.

Again, our capacity of beneficence may enlarge and accumulate our possessions by a sum to which no day should fail to witness an increase. It has been well said: What we give, we possess; and there is nothing else that we are so sure of keeping. There is a felt property in whatever happiness we have created. I knew a man who was among the richest of his day, who for many years was cut off by bodily infirmity from all of what is commonly called the enjoyment of life, never sat at his own table, weighed the stale bread which was his only food, did not dare to eat enough even of that to appease his hunger, and could give himself absolutely no indulgence in which the mortal frame was needed to bear a part, But I never knew a happier man; for he made it the business of his life to minister to the happiness of others, to inquire into need and distress, to send portions to the destitute, to gladden the poverty-stricken, to lighten the burdens of age and infirmity, to make children's eyes dance and their hearts leap. It always seemed to me that he realized spiritually the brutal wish of the imperial glutton, that he might have a thousand mouths to feed with. I am sure that he fed every day with gladness and thanksgiving at more tables than he could count,—that he was warmed by all the fires he had kindled on else cheerless hearths,—that there was not a gift of his that was not as truly a God-send to himself as to the recipients of his bounty. With all his wealth he was constrained to live as one having nothing, yet he was as one possessing all things.

Possessions of this kind are always within our reach. The opportunities for doing good are incessant in our waking hours, co-extensive with our social lives. We may or may not have what are called large means of beneficence. The rule for us must be that of the ancient book, —"Be merciful after thy power. If thou hast much, give plenteously. If thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little; for so gatherest thou thyself a good reward in the day of necessity." But we all really have large means of beneficence, unless we ourselves are very small; for we ourselves are our best means of beneficence. Our whole social life may be coined into charities, not, to be sure, into pounds or talents, but —what is of even more importance—into mites and farthings of considerate and unceasing kindness. We are never in one another's society without throwing off continually proof-impressions of ourselves. There is a perpetual effluence of such temper, of such spirit as there is in us. And we are constantly with recipient souls that take from us what will make them happier and better, if we are truly meek and kind and generous. How many, too, are there to whom in our intercourse little things are great! In our own households we may diffuse untold happiness by the unselfish spirit, which is always ready to concede and slow to claim. Among our friends and casual associates costless courtesy, unstudied kindness, the tone of intercourse indicated by the phrase, "In honor preferring one another," may be a perpetual ministry of peace, harmony and gladness. There are always those whom a kind word, a kind look may cheer and encourage, may sometimes relieve of pressing burdens, of incipient despondency,—an influence which, I suppose, we all have felt, and should never be slow to impart. There are little children whom a mere smile or the slightest love-token will gladden. There are the weary, sad, infirm, dispirited, to whom we may carry brightness from our own happier condition. There are those whom we can counsel, warn, strengthen in the right, help over steep and rough passages on their lifeway. And all that we do for others is ours,—our possession for life, for eternity.

In all these ways we may possess, even though we have not; and if we have, what we thus possess is more truly and enduringly ours. The time is not far for any of us, for some, no doubt, very near, when we shall have nothing; for as we brought nothing into this world, it is certain that we can carry nothing out. For that day God grant that we be written among those, though having nothing, yet possessing all things.

Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. We hope the plan may be destined to wide adoption by Liberal churches as part of their regular church-work.

The word "UNITY" in the title bears to the Committee who arrange the series a wide meaning, pointing more to the substance, than to the forms, of religious thought and faith; and in inviting contributions they have sought, not only through the whole range, but in both directions beyond the range, of those who bear the "Unitarian" name,—though most of the writers must naturally be found within that name. "New Orthodoxy," "New Judaism," those who care for no name but "Religion," and the "Ethical Societies," will all be represented. The choice of subject is left to the writers; and *each writer is responsible for his own utterance alone, and for nothing else in the series.* "One of your best—a life-helping sermon, or a thought-sermon reaching the life," was the invitation sent out.

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THE "CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT"

NEW FURNISHED FOR NEXT YEAR.

The second year of the "CHURCH DOOR PULPIT" begins in April, and the preachers that are to preach the fortnightly sermon in it are gathering. The series of twenty sermons will differ from last year's in two respects. Four numbers will be devoted respectively to

Channing, Parker, Emerson, Martineau,

giving a score or two of what in each writer may be called his "*Gospel passages.*" If one would learn in short space for what the four great prophets of our Liberal Faith stand, let him read these numbers; and keep them on hand to give a friend. If these four pamphlets do not furnish "Scripture readings" for the *pulpit* also, it will be a surprise.

In three more numbers the subjects

"God," "Miracles," "The Bible,"

will be respectively treated in extracts from several writers. Each of these three pamphlets will be, as it were, a handful of short liberal tracts on its special subject.

The other thirteen numbers will probably be single sermons from as many preachers,—preachers ranging in their thought from Liberal Orthodoxy to the Society for Ethical Culture; most of them finding a home, therefore, under the Unitarian name. To announce the broad religious fellowship, the "unity without uniformity" of faith, implied in such pulpit comradeship,—to announce and emphasize and further that, is one purpose for which the CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT as well as UNITY was started; it is one purpose which itself started "Unitarianism." The independence of each writer is guarded by the note printed on his sermon, that he is responsible for his own alone, and for nothing else in the series. So far as those invited have been heard from and decided on, the list, alphabetically arranged, stands now:

Felix Adler,	**Rowland Connor,**	**Andrew P. Peabody,**
C. A. Bartol,	**Washington Gladden,**	**Minot J. Savage,**
Phillips Brooks,	**T. W. Higginson,**	**John Snyder,**
John W. Chadwick,	**John C. Learned,**	**S. H. Sonnenschein.**

The hope is that our churches, West and East, will catch the new church-habit, to *regularly and freely furnish forth a table or shelf near the door with such pamphlets*, first for home reading and then for lending and mailing, *each reader becoming his own missionary society for whatever he finds worthy.* It is found that a minute's "prelude" from the minister, describing the "Church-Door" sermon for the day and its preacher, interests the people in it and him, and usually causes the table to be swept of its thirty, forty or fifty copies. But much of the people's interest depends upon this prelude-habit. To make his dumb colleague do good work the minister must treat him heartily.

Of course some of the sermons will be more liked than others, and be better fitted for mission service. If now and then, among the twenty, one contradicts words spoken at the other end of the church, what then? The note on each pamphlet explains the matter; and, if necessary, the "prelude" can explain it farther. But it should be remembered that these sermons, departing somewhat from our thought, are the very ones which best preach our Gospel of Religious Fellowship, which show we *mean* it.

In this way nearly 30,000 "Church-Door Pulpit" sermons have been distributed more or less widely this past year, mainly in the west. Probably nothing like so many tracts could have been circulated here in any other way. And probably no better way can be devised of making each church, East and West, a little "Propaganda" society of our Faith and Principles. Everybody knows *one* person who would like to read what *he* likes. Anybody will hand or mail one tract. And this local and post-office Propaganda is much more likely to enlist members and interest the church at large, if the work is allowed to cost them a trifle, than if it costs them nothing. A tract *paid for* is almost redeemed! Paid for by one of its receivers and on-speeders instead of by some Society, it is "twice blessed,—it blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Each Church that subscribes $25 for a block of fifty copies and uses them thoroughly through individual readers, as here suggested, besides any good done in its own homes, sends out twenty times fifty, or one thousand tracts a year, to spread the Liberal Faith—a little mission well worth adding regularly to any church-life.

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